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Meaning of Folklore

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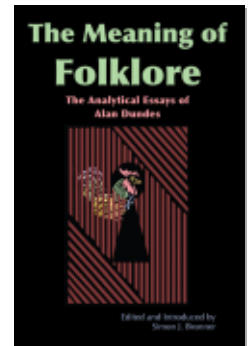
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FROM ETIC TO EMIC UNITS IN THE STRUCTURAL STUDY OF FOLKTALES

(Postscript) The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique

Introduction

Dundes opened this essay on folk material with a binary division of diachronic and synchronic perspectives of time. Diachronic approached the development of material historically, whereas synchronic analysis examined items contemporaneously. Dundes observed that diachronic approaches had dominated thinking about folklore, leading, he argued, to analyses of lore without the folk, that is, without the social basis of the material. One result, he claimed, was the identification of original forms without questioning how those forms came into being in the first place. A move toward synchronic approaches raised the issue of the basic unit of analysis, especially if comparative work was to be carried out. Pointing out problems with the literary “motif” as a comparative unit of narrative, Dundes proposed the use of structural units such as *motifeme* and *allomotif*. These were drawn from the formalist theories of Vladimir Propp, who conceived of predictable “functions” or actions that occur in certain places within the sequence of the story.

The advantage of the structural units of *motifeme* and *allomotif*s, according to Dundes, was that they represented the elements of a story as they were told by a narrator. In this way, they composed “emic” units (applying a term proposed by linguist Kenneth Pike). Drawn from “phonemic,” a sound used in a language community, *emic* generally refers to native categories. *Etic* is comparable to “phonetic,” a system devised by the analyst’s rendering of speech sounds, thus forming what is thought of as an “analytic” category.

The rhetoric of “type” and “motif” came from literary study, in which key incidents and objects were used to categorize the composition of stories and to suggest subjects for imaginative treatment. Applied to oral literature, *type* referred to recognizable unified plots that tended to remain intact in collected stories around the world, and could be organized into various themes, such as “animal tales” (types 1–299), “tales of magic” (300–749), and “formula tales” (2000–2399). *Motifs* were components of stories that drew attention to themselves, such as the object “glass shoes” (F823.2) or the incident of “Slipper test. Identification by fitting of slipper” (H36.1) in *Cinderella*. The letters before the numbers range from A (mythological motifs) to Z (miscellaneous groups of motifs). Their arrangement suggests a hierarchy of narrative, giving primary place to the oldest or

most developed myths, and secondary position to folktales, going from “Animals” (B) to “Traits of Character” (W). Humor, presumably more contemporary and concise, is relegated to the end in the famous “X” slot (“Humor concerning sex” was X700–799). The classification system of the motif-index has been likened to the Dewey decimal system of library classification, because decimal points allow for expansion as the corpus of known folktales grows.

The tale-type and motif indexes, now standard reference works identifying folk narrative building blocks, were conceived of in the early twentieth century as a way to globalize the study of folktale, with the intent of finding the origins and distribution of its elements. Even before the landmark original volumes on tale types by Antti Aarne (1910) and Stith Thompson ([1928] 1961), there had been classifications of songs and stories that attempted to identify units of narrative so as to facilitate international comparison. Although recognizing Dundes’s criticisms, folkloristic advocates of motif and type indexes, such as Hasan El-Shamy, have noted that Thompson’s motif-index was the first reference to go beyond “mere alphabetical lists of terms” and differentiate between motifs and folktale types. Thompson also incorporated more folk material than Aarne, since Thompson included ballads, fables, local legends, and jokes. Aarne’s tale-type index systemized mostly European wonder tales into a numerical list, and identified subtypes. It implied that all versions of a type had a genetic relationship, but Thompson’s motif index did not ([1932–1936] 1975). The extent of classificatory work, according to the principles established by Aarne and Thompson, is indicated by 186 entries in David S. Azzolina’s *Tale Type- and Motif-Indexes* (1987). It is a list that has continued to grow (see El-Shamy 2004; Jason 2000; Goldberg 2000; Tatum 2000; Jauhainen 1998; Würzbach 1995; Neugaard 1993; and Stitt and Dodge 1991).

Attached to Dundes’s original 1962 polemic against the tale-type and motif indexes is a postscript with a more temperate tone, published thirty-five years later. He pointed out additional problems of the indices, based on etic units, but announced that they still provided “two of the most valuable tools in the professional folklorist’s arsenal of aids for analysis.” Some of Dundes’s concerns for expanding the coverage of the indices were addressed in the three volumes of Hans-Jörg Uther’s *The Types of International Folktales* (2004). The commentaries on classification by motif and type by Uther, Dundes, and other folklorists can be read in a special issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research* (1997), and in *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature* (Garry and El-Shamy 2005). See also Ben-Amos 1980; Georges 1983; and Holbek 1990.

The structural analysis of motifemes and allomotifs, as it turns out, has not displaced the identification of motifs and types in folkloristics. However, for the purposes of comparison and interpretation, Dundes’s oft-cited essay signaled more attention paid to alternative, emic systems of representing narratives as they are learned and communicated. Dundes demonstrated the symbolic equivalence of allomotifs for a single tale type in “The Symbolic Equivalence of Allomotifs in the Rabbit-Herd (AT 570),” reprinted in *Parsing Through Customs* (1987j). He also used a Proppian classificatory approach in his doctoral dissertation, published as *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (1964b). Dundes’s influence is apparent in the essays in *Patterns in Oral Literature*, edited by Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal (1977), which took up the challenge of structural models for oral literature. Other studies using allomotifs include S. S. Jones 1990; Lovell-Smith 1996; Holbek 1993; and Carroll 1992a, 1992b.

From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales

TRADITIONALLY, THE STUDY OF FOLKLORE in general and folktales in particular has tended to be diachronic rather than synchronic. The emphasis has clearly been upon the genesis and development of folkloristic materials rather than upon the structure of these materials. Folklorists of the late nineteenth century were much more concerned with how folklore came into being than with what folklore was. Genetic explanations were considered sufficient to define the nature of folklore. Thus the solar mythologists claimed that the bulk of folkloristic materials was primitive man's poetic translation of celestial phenomena such as the rising and setting of the sun. After the "eclipse of solar mythology" as Richard M. Dorson has so felicitously phrased it,¹ there came the Anthropological School. The members of this group were convinced that folklore evolved from historical facts and primordial customs. In the course of the unilinear evolution of all cultures, there were preserved vestigial remains of the archaic origins. These remains were termed survivals in culture, and the study of these survivals was called folklore. The modern version of this form of diachronic study is fostered by the advocates of the myth-ritual theory who claim that all myth evolves from ritual. Since no attempt is made to explain the ultimate origin of the ritual, one can see that the question of genesis has been dropped in favor of the question of evolutionary development. Similarly, in the most modern method of folklore study, the so-called Finnish historical-geographical method, questions of ultimate origin are eschewed. The aim of this method is the delineation of the "complete life history of a particular tale."² The users of the historical-geographical method attempt to determine the paths of dissemination and the process of development of folkloristic materials. By assembling all the known versions of a particular tale, the folklorist seeks to reconstruct the hypothetical original form of the tale. There is, however, no attempt to explain how this original form may have come into being in the first place. Thus there has been a movement away from the early interest in genesis and cause towards an interest in the process of transmission and evolutionary development. But in any case, the study of folklore has remained diachronic.

All three approaches to folklore—the mythological, the anthropological, and the historical-geographical—are alike not only in that they are diachronic, but also in that they are comparative. All three utilize materials from many cultures. This was why it became apparent to folklorists, no matter which of these approaches they favored, that for comparative studies there had to be some convenient means of referring to individual parts or pieces of folkloristic items as well as to these items as wholes. In the second place, in order to have trustworthy comparison, one needed to operate with comparable units. This was particularly important to the members of the Finnish school inasmuch as it was precisely the differences of some of the smaller units of a given folktale upon which the conclusions of a historical-geographical study were often based. Unfortunately, the system of units which was developed was primarily intended to answer only the first need, that is, of

supplying a means of referring to individual parts and pieces of folklore as well as to larger chunks of folklore. The criterion of having genuine comparable units did not enter into the construction of either the motif-index or the Aarne-Thompson tale-type index. Thus however useful the motif-index and tale-type index may be as bibliographical aids or as means of symbol shorthand, their basic units, namely the motif and tale type, do not provide an adequate basis for comparative studies.

In order to see the inadequacy of the motif and tale type as units to be used in the comparative study of the folktales, one must have some idea of what any kind of a basic unit should consist of. Units are utilitarian logical constructs of measure which, though admittedly relativistic and arbitrary, permit greater facility in the examination and comparison of the materials studied in the natural and social sciences. It is important that units be standards of one kind of quantity (e.g., units of heat, length, and so forth). Units can be conceived as being abstractions of distinct entities which may be combined to form larger units or broken down into smaller units. There is an infinitude of units since they are man-made categorical attempts to describe the nature of objective reality. With a relativistic perspective, one can see that no matter what unit one considers, other smaller subunits may be postulated. Historically, this is what has happened in the development of the neutron from the atom which in turn developed from the molecule. A minimal unit may thus be defined as the smallest unit useful for a given analysis with the implicit understanding that although a minimal unit could be subdivided, it would serve no useful purpose to do so.

Folklorists are not alone with regard to encountering difficulties in defining appropriate units. As Kluckhohn points out: "Most anthropologists would agree that no constant elemental units like atoms, cells, or genes have as yet been satisfactorily established with culture in general."³ On the other hand, in one area of anthropology, namely linguistics, such units as the phoneme and the morpheme have been delimited. Roman Jakobson remarks in connection with the phoneme that "Linguistic analysis with its concept of ultimate phonemic entities signally converges with modern physics which revealed the granular structure of matter as composed of elementary particles." However, most anthropologists and linguists seem to feel that the units of linguistics, although extremely useful in the study of language, are of little or no use outside the linguistic area.⁵ One notable exception is Kenneth Pike, who has even tried to employ linguistics-like units in an analysis of all human behavior. In his ambitious *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Pike makes a number of stimulating theoretical statements which appear to be applicable to folklore. Although Pike makes no mention of folklore by name, he begins his study with an analysis of a party game which falls, of course, in the realm of folklore. If one examines Pike's theoretical presentation, one can see that it may well be that folklorists can profit from the model provided by linguists. True, it is always dangerous to use ready-made patterns since there is the inevitable risk of forcing material into the prefabricated Procrustean pattern. However, this technique is justified if it aids in solving a problem, in this instance, namely the determination of units in folklore. It therefore remains to be demonstrated that first, the motif and tale type are nonstructural, or to use Pike's apt term, etic units, and second that there are empirically observable structural or emic units in folktales which may be discovered through the application of quasi-linguistic techniques.

One cannot criticize the motif on the basis of its not being monomial or indecomposable. As has already been stated, any unit can be subdivided into smaller units. However, the motif is open to criticism as a unit in that it is not a standard of one kind of quantity.

Thompson's discussion of the motif makes this clear. According to Thompson, a motif is "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition."⁶ It is noteworthy that in this definition, the crucial differentia is what the element does (i.e., persists in tradition) rather than what the element is. The definition is thus diachronic rather than synchronic. Thompson speaks of three classes of motifs. First there are actors; second are "items in the background of the action—magic objects, unusual customs, strange beliefs and the like"; and third there are "single incidents" which, according to Thompson, "comprise the great majority of motifs." Exactly what an incident is is never stated. If motifs can be actors, items, and incidents, then they are hardly units. They are not measures of a single quantity. There are, after all, no classes of inch or ounce. In addition, the classes of motifs are not even mutually exclusive. Can one conceive of an incident which does not include either an actor or an item, if not both? It is reiterated that without rigorously defined units, true comparison is well-nigh impossible. Can an actor be compared with an item?

Perhaps the most important theoretical consequence of the use of the motif as a minimal unit has been the tendency to regard motifs as totally free entities which are independent of contextual environments. Moreover, the superorganic abstraction is often given a life of its own. When Thompson in speaking of motifs asks: "Do some combine freely everywhere?" the wording is no accident. The abstract units are the subject of the verb and the question is whether they do the combining. This is made clear by Thompson's following question: "Are some isolated, *living* an independent life as a single-motif tale-type?"⁷ But the most critical consequence of chopping up folklore into motifs is that mentioned above, namely that the motif is considered to be a completely isolable unit. Furthermore, such a unit is often assumed to be able to enter freely into limitless combinations. Lowie, for example, speaks of a "perfectly free" element of folklore which could appear in various combinations.⁸

Yet if motifs are truly free to combine, then the larger unit, the tale type, appears to be on somewhat shaky ground. A type, according to Thompson, is "a traditional tale that has an independent existence." Once again, it may be seen that the tale type is not defined in terms of morphological characteristics. Instead, just as in the case of the motif, the criterion of existence through time is employed. Thompson notes that a complete tale or type is "made up of a number of motifs in a relatively fixed order and combination." If the motifs are in a relatively fixed order, then it appears to be unlikely that they "combine freely everywhere." However, if one presumed from the description of a tale type that a tale type was simply a unit made up of smaller units called motifs, one would have to take account of the fact that one class of motifs, namely incidents, may serve as "true tale-types," and, in fact, according to Thompson, "By far the largest number of traditional types consist of these single motifs."⁹ If this is so, then the distinction between motif and tale type seems somewhat blurred.

The Hungarian folklorist Hans Honti has given probably the best description of the tale type as a unit.¹⁰ He observes that there are three possible ways of looking at the tale type as a unit. First, the tale type is a binding together of a number of motifs; second, the tale type stands as an individual entity in contrast with other tale types; and third, the tale type is, so to speak, a substance which is manifested in multiple appearances called variants. Honti then points out that in purely morphological terms, a tale type is only a formal unit when contrasted with other tale types. He rejects the other two types of unity after making a comparison with botanical classification. He notes that plants are composed of similar morphological elements: roots, stalks, leaves, and so on. However much these elements may differ in different types, they are uniform within individual types. Thus one can put plants into a

structurally based classification system according to the constitution of their roots, stalks, leaves, and so on. But, in the case of folktales, the type is either made up of a variable combination of motifs or a great number of variants. In other words, the constituent elements of folktales, according to Honti, are not constant, but rather extremely variable. This makes strictly morphological classification difficult. It should be noted here that folklorists have somehow sensed that there is something of a fixed pattern in the arrangement of motifs in a folktale, but at the same time they have realized that the motifs may vary considerably. The very heart of the matter of folktale analysis is to ascertain what is constant and what is variable. This may well involve the distinction between form and content.¹¹ Form would be the constant while content would be the variable. In this light, one can see that the Aarne-Thompson tale typology is based upon the content, that is, the variable.

Aarne has three major divisions of folktales: Animal Tales, Ordinary Folktales, and Jokes and Anecdotes. The second division, which is the largest, has numerous subdivisions including: A. Tales of Magic, B. Religious Tales, C. Novelle or Romantic Tales, and D. Tales of the Stupid Ogre. Moreover, subdivision A., Tales of Magic, is further subdivided into: Supernatural Adversaries, Supernatural or Enchanted Husband (Wife) or Other Relatives, Superhuman Tasks, Supernatural Helpers, Magic Objects, Supernatural Power or Knowledge, and Other Tales of the Supernatural. Aarne then groups his tales, which by the way were restricted to collections from northern and western Europe, under these subjective headings. Only the Formula Tales category, which is listed under Jokes and Anecdotes, may be said to be based upon structural criteria.

One can see from even a cursory examination that this classification is not based upon the structure of the tales themselves so much as the subjective evaluation of the classifier. And yet this is all that folklorists have in the way of tale typology. If a tale involves a stupid ogre and a magic object, it is truly an arbitrary decision whether the tale is placed under II A, Tales of Magic (Magic Objects), or II D, Tales of the Stupid Ogre. With regard to the subdivisions of Tales of Magic, where would one classify a folktale in which a superhuman task is resolved by a supernatural helper who possesses supernatural power? Perhaps the best illustration of the fact that Aarne-Thompson typology is based upon the variable and not upon the constant may be found by examining tale types which differ only with respect to the dramatis personae. In the Animal Tale (Type 9), *The Unjust Partner*, there is a version listed in which in the division of the crop, the fox takes the corn while the benighted bear takes the more bulky chaff. Under the Tales of the Stupid Ogre, one finds Tale Type 1030, *The Crop Division*. It is the same story except that the dramatis personae are a man and an ogre. Under the Stupid Ogre listing, Aarne notes that the tale sometimes appears with a fox and a bear as the principals, and in fact he even comments in his preface to the type index upon this duplication of materials: "This narrative has been listed among the ogre tales, to which apparently it originally belonged; but it is also found with a note as to its proper place, among the animal tales as a transaction between fox and bear or man and bear." This example is by no means unique. One may see the same kind of distinction with regard to differences in the dramatis personae by comparing such tale types as 4 and 72; 43 and 1097; 123 and 333; 153 and 1133; 250 and 275; and 38, 151, and 1159; to name just a few.¹²

Another serious difficulty with the tale type as a unit is the fact that often one or more tale types are included in another tale type. This is analogous to the occurrence of actor and item motifs in incident motifs. Thus in some versions of Tale Type 1685, *The Foolish Bridegroom*, there appears the incident in which the fool, when told to cast "good eyes"

at the bride, throws ox-eyes and sheep-eyes on the plate. This "incident" also appears as Tale Type 1006, Casting Eyes, listed under Tales of the Stupid Ogre. This blending and incorporation of tale types is indicated by the fact that in the case of a complex tale such as Type 300, Dragon Slayer, there are no less than eight other tale types which the classifiers recognized were sometimes commingled. One can see that even Honti's claim, that tale types were morphological units in that one tale type contrasted with other tale types, is not demonstrable. Actually, any professional folklorist engaged in folktale research knows very well that folktales, as collected from informants, very often are combinations of two or more Aarne-Thompson tale types. The point is that no matter how useful the Aarne-Thompson index may be in locating critical studies and variants, the Aarne-Thompson tale type as a structural unit of folklore leaves much to be desired. In fairness, it should be stated that neither Aarne nor Thompson ever intended the index to be any more than a reference aid. "It is, of course, clear that the main purpose of the classification of traditional narrative, whether by type or motif, is to furnish an exact style of reference, whether it be for analytical study or for the making of accurate inventories of large bodies of material. If the two indexes can in this way promote accuracy of terminology and can act as keys to unlock large inaccessible stores of traditional fiction, they will have fulfilled their purpose."¹³

However, what has happened is that this laudable index terminology has begun to be thought of as a kind of typology. Some folklorists tend to regard Tale Type 1030, The Crop Division, as a generic kind of unit. What is more, because the Aarne-Thompson tale typology has achieved international currency and has done a great deal to facilitate international folktale research, folklorists are afraid to introduce an entirely new system. For example, Honti notes that if tales could be arranged according to a theoretically appropriate morphological system instead of a theoretically inadmissible logical system, it might be somewhat easier to work through folktale material. Nevertheless, he states his conviction that this does not constitute enough reason to replace the well-established Aarne-Thompson system. He comments on the inconvenience which would result from putting the catalogs of the various national folklore archives under a new system.¹⁴ This kind of thinking is very dangerous and leads to intellectual stagnation, which the field of folklore can ill afford. In any field of learning, particularly in the natural or social sciences, if something is faulty or inadequate and recognized as such, it should be changed. Folklorists are supposed to study tradition, not be bound by it. Tradition and convenience are hardly sufficient reasons for scholars to perpetuate an acknowledged error. Comparative studies in folklore require carefully defined units, and if the motif and Aarne-Thompson tale type do not meet these needs, then new units must be devised.

New units have been suggested through the application of something like linguistic methodology to folkloristic materials. In particular, a Russian folklorist, Vladimir Propp, in 1928 published *Morphology of the Folktale*. In this work Propp pays tribute to Joseph Béier for being the first to recognize that folktales contained invariant and variable elements. However, Bedier, whose key work, *Les Fabliaux*, was published in 1893, despite an attempt to express these related elements schematically, failed to determine the exact nature of the invariable units. Propp, borrowing the schematic technique, set himself the task of defining the invariable units of folktales.

Propp's aim was to delineate a morphology of fairy tales, and by fairy tales, he meant those tales classified by Aarne between 300 and 749, which Aarne termed "Tales of Magic." Propp's study was synchronic, which was in marked contrast to the rest of folklore

scholarship. Propp hoped to describe the fairy tale according to its component parts and to indicate the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole. He begins by defining a new minimal unit, the function. He did this because he noticed that the names of the dramatis personae as well as their attributes changed but that the actions or functions of the dramatis personae did not change. In other words, to use an example mentioned previously, on a functional level, the tale of Tale Type 1030, Crop Division, is the same whether the dramatis personae are animals or humans. Hence Propp states that “The functions of a folktale’s dramatis personae must be considered as its basic components; and we must first of all extract them as such.”¹⁵ To illustrate how the minimal constituent unit of the function may be extracted from the dramatis personae, Propp, drawing material from four separate fairy tales, gives the following example:

1. A king gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero (the recipient) away to another kingdom.
2. An old man gives Súčenko a horse. The horse carries Suenko away to another kingdom.
3. A sorcerer gives Ivan a little boat. The boat takes him to another kingdom.
4. The princess gives Ivan a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry him away into another kingdom and so forth.

Clearly, though the dramatis personae vary, the function is the same. Structurally speaking, it does not matter whether the object which carries the hero to another kingdom is an eagle, a horse, a boat, or men. Propp then proceeds to further define the function, and his further definition of the function is one of the most revolutionary and important contributions to folklore theory in decades.¹⁶ Propp states that “an action cannot be defined apart from its place in the process of narration.”¹⁷ This single statement reveals the unmistakable fallacy of thinking of folklore in terms of isolated motifs. The action or function can only be defined in its place in the process of narration. Honti, who was not familiar with Propp’s work, had said that it was difficult to conceive of a motif other than as part of a type,¹⁸ but Propp went much further. Not only is the minimal unit to be considered as part of a type, but it must also be considered with respect to where it occurs in that type.

Propp does succeed in distinguishing between the constant and the variable in folktales. He notes: “Functions serve as stable, constant elements in folktales, independent of who performs them, and how they are fulfilled by the dramatis personae.”¹⁹ After analyzing a randomly selected sample of 100 Russian fairy tales, Propp was able to draw the following startling conclusions. First, the number of functions known in the fairy tale is limited. In fact, Propp discovered that there are thirty-one possible functions. Furthermore, the sequence of functions is always identical. This does not mean that all thirty-one functions are in every fairy tale, but only that “the absence of several functions does not change the order of those remaining.” As a result of his analysis, Propp is able to suggest a new unit to replace the Aarne-Thompson tale type. “Tales evidencing identical functions can be considered as belonging to one type. On this basis, an index of types can be created not relying upon plot features which are essentially vague and diffuse but, rather, upon exact structural features.” Propp finds that every one of the 100 tales in his sample will fit into one formula and he concludes that “All fairy tales, by their structure, belong to one and the same type.”²⁰

The distinction between the old minimal unit, the motif, and the new minimal unit, the function, may be seen very well in terms of Kenneth Pike's valuable distinction between the etic and the emic. The etic approach is nonstructural but classificatory in that the analyst devises logical categories of systems, classes and units without attempting to make them reflect actual structure in particular data. For Pike, etic units are created by the analyst as constructs for the handling of comparative cross-cultural data.²¹ In contrast, the emic approach is a mono-contextual, structural one. "An emic approach must deal with particular events as parts of larger wholes to which they are related and from which they obtain their ultimate significance, whereas an etic approach may abstract events, for particular purposes, from their context or local system of events, in order to group them on a world-wide scale without essential reference to the structure of any one language or culture." "... emic units within this theory are not absolutes in a vacuum, but rather are points in a system, and these points are defined RELATIVE to the system. A unit must be studied, not in isolation, but as a part of a total functioning componential system within a total culture. It is this problem which ultimately forms the basis for the necessity of handling emics as different from etics. . . ."²² Pike believes that the emic structure is a part of the pattern of objective reality and is not merely the construct of the analyst. Whether one follows Pike on this point or whether one considers that emic units are like beauty in being solely in the eyes of the beholder, one can see that the distinction between structural and nonstructural units is sound. For a complete discussion of the distinction between etic and emic (coined by using the last portions of the words phonetic and phonemic), one should consult Pike's work.

Pike's delineation of the simultaneous trimodal structuring of emic units is of considerable importance for folktale analysis. Pike's three modes are the feature mode, the manifestation mode and the distribution mode. At the risk of oversimplifying Pike's elaborate scheme, one might translate the modes into Propp's analysis by seeing the feature mode as exemplified by the function, the manifestation mode by the various elements which can fulfill a function, and the distribution mode by the positional characteristics of a particular function, that is, where among the thirty-one possible functions it occurs. One reason for bothering to put Propp's analysis in Pike's terminology is an extraordinary verbal coincidence. Pike's minimum unit of the feature mode is the EMIC MOTIF or MOTIFEME.²³ In other words, Propp's function in Pike's scheme of analysis would be called a MOTIFEME. Since the term function has not yet achieved any amount of currency among folklorists, it is here proposed that MOTIFEME be used instead.

With the establishment of the structural unit, MOTIFEME, one can see the usefulness of the term ALLOMOTIF for those motifs which occur in any given motifemic context. Allomotifs would bear the same relationship to motifeme as do allophones to phonemes and allomorphs to morphemes. The term MOTIF would continue to be used, but only as an etic unit like the phone or morph. The difference between etic and emic analysis of folktales, that is the difference between analysis by motif and analysis by motifeme, is considerable. For example, Propp's twelfth function or motifeme refers to the hero's being tested, interrogated, or attacked in preparation for his receiving either a magical agent or helper. For instance, a prospective donor may test the hero by assigning him difficult tasks. On the other hand, the twenty-fifth motifeme involves the assignment of a difficult task, usually by the villain. In other words, etically, or in terms of motifs, the same motif may be used in different motifemes. This means that the mere analyzing of folktales into motifs may be misleading. Folklorists are accustomed to treat all occurrences of a particular motif

as being of equal or identical significance. This is, in Pike's theory, tantamount to treating homophonous or homomorphic forms as identical in meaning.²⁴ However, one might legitimately ask how one recognizes the appropriate motifeme for a particular motif. If one observes a specific motif, how can one ascertain which motifeme it subserves? Propp addresses himself to this very question. Again, it is the notion of a function or motifeme in the frame of sequential context, i.e., *in situ*. It is always possible to define a function or motifeme according to its consequences. Accordingly, if the receiving of a magical agent follows the solution of a task, then the motif belongs to the twelfth motifeme and it is clearly a case of the donor testing the hero. If, on the other hand, the receipt of a bride and a marriage follow, then the motif belongs to the twenty-fifth motifeme, the imposition of a difficult task.

It is not only important to realize that the same motif may be used in different motifemes, but it is equally important to realize that different motifs may be used in the same motifeme. Thus the helpful animal could be a cow, cat, bird, fish, and so on. Recalling that motifs are actors and items, it is obvious that for a given function or motifeme, there may be literally hundreds of motifs which would be appropriate. (Of course, not all "appropriate" motifs would necessarily be traditional, i.e., actually found in folktales.) An example of the alternation of motifs is provided by the different versions of the Potiphar's wife story. This is the story of a son-figure whom a mother-figure tries to seduce. When the son-figure refuses, the mother-figure accuses the son of attempting to violate her, whereupon a father-figure metes out punishment to the son-figure. In many versions the punishment is blindness. In other versions, the hero's feet are cut off. In probably the oldest known version of the tale, that of "The Story of the Two Brothers," dating from the fourteenth or thirteenth century B.C., the son-figure, Baïti, castrates himself.²⁵ One could say that the consequences of the seduction attempt include the cutting off of the hero's leg or phallus and blindness. Since these consequences are distributionally similar, they would appear to be part of the same motifeme, that is, they would appear to be allomotifs. Castration and blindness do not seem to be in complementary distribution but rather appear to be in free variation. In fact, it is probable that one element could be substituted for the other without changing the plot structure. In this light, a curious Greek version of the Potiphar's wife story becomes a little more intelligible. Phoenix, the son of Amyntor, was accused by Phthia, Amyntor's concubine, of having violated her. The father, on the strength of the concubine's false accusation of seduction, blinded his son and cursed him with childlessness.²⁶ If blindness and castration are allomotifs, then the connection between blindness and childlessness is not so remote.

An example of allomotifs in the folklore of a primitive culture may be found in the North American Indian test tales. In Boas's important study of the Tsimshian versions of the test theme, a jealous uncle or brother subjects the hero to tests.²⁷ In order to obtain a wife, the hero must survive any one of the following elements: a snapping door, caves which open and close, a closing tree cleft or canoe, a clam with crushing shells, dangerous animals guarding a door, or a vagina dentata. All these elements appear to be allomotifs of the same motifeme, which, incidentally, looks very much like Propp's twenty-fifth motifeme, "A difficult task is proposed to the hero."

The notion of allomotifs has important theoretical implications for the Finnish historical-geographical method. In this method, considerable significance is placed upon the differences occurring in the variants of a given tale. By plotting the time (historic) and place (geographic) of a given story element, one attempts in this method to reconstruct

the original form of the tale and its mode of development and dissemination. If, however, the arsenal of a storyteller included allomotifs, that is, if there are two or more traditional motifs any of which would fulfill a particular motifeme, then the analyst would have to be extremely cautious in evaluating such alternations. This would also explain why a given storyteller might tell the same tale differently upon different occasions. The choice of a specific allomotif (e.g., an obscene one) might be culturally conditioned by the type of audience. Furthermore, what folklorists have hitherto considered as two separate tale types or blends of tale types might be rather a case of the alternation of allomotifs or allomotif clusters. As Propp points out, although the storyteller apparently creates within a definite sequence of motifemes, he is "absolutely free in his choice of the nomenclature and attributes of the *dramatis personae*."²⁸

The phenomenon of the limiting nature of a sequential formula of motifemes merits study. It would be of interest, for example, to ascertain whether there is an absolute minimum number of motifemes necessary for the construction of a folktale. Propp speaks only of an upper limit. It would also be interesting to know if the sequence corresponded in any way with the structure of other cultural elements, such as ritual. In addition, a psychological study of the motifemic sequence might help to elucidate the etiology of the pattern. It should be noted that as yet no attempt has been made to see if there is motifemic patterning in folktales other than fairy tales, to say nothing of the other genres of folklore. Moreover, it has not yet been determined whether motifemic patterning varies from culture area to culture area. It is not even known whether or not there is such patterning in the folktales of primitive cultures. Motifemic analysis of all types of folktales in all types of cultures must be accomplished before any reliable comparative work may be attempted. Just as comparative linguistics is based upon emic analysis,²⁹ so ultimately must comparative folklore and mythology. In other words, solid synchronic analysis is needed to define adequately the formal structural characteristics of folkloristic genres before truly meaningful diachronic, i.e., historical, studies may be undertaken.

It seems safe to say that the emic unit of the motifeme (Propp's function) marks a tremendous theoretical advance over the etic unit of the motif. With regard to larger units, such as tale types, Propp was quite right when he said that "Types do exist, not on the level outlined by Aarne, but on the level of the structural properties of folk-tales. . . ."³⁰ However, the use of the emic unit should not be construed as in any way replacing the need for the etic units. The emic unit replaces the etic unit as a structural unit to be used as the basis for comparative studies; but with respect to the practical matters of classification and cataloging, there is certainly a definite place for etic units. As Propp himself observed, his basic task was "clearly the extraction of the 'genera.'"³¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, in a lengthy commentary on Propp's work, notes that before such formalistic studies, folklorists tended to ignore what folktales had in common, but that after formalistic analysis, folklorists are deprived of the means of seeing how folktales differ.³² If Propp has found, so to speak, a "generative grammar" for Aarne-Thompson tale types 300 to 749, how can individual variants of the same structural tale type be distinguished? The point is that a structurally based tale typology does not in any way eliminate the need for a practical index such as Thompson's. As Honti suggested, synthetic and morphological typology should not be used instead of analytical indices and systems, but in addition to them. Assuming that there may be different formulaic sequences of motifemes for different kinds of folktales or for folktales in different culture areas, there could well be a tale-type index based upon morphological criteria. But

this index would be in addition to the Aarne-Thompson type index and would be cross-referenced so that a folktale scholar could tell at a glance what Aarne-Thompson tale types belonged to which morphological tale types. As Pike notes, etic analysis must precede emic analysis. It is therefore obvious that folklorists need both and further that they should not mistake the one for the other.

The structural study of folklore has really just begun. Except for a few scattered studies such as Sebeok's study of charms,³³ there has been very little work of this kind. With the aid of the rigorous definition of structural units, the future of structural studies in folklore looks promising indeed.

Notes

1. Richard M. Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology," *Journal of American Folklore*, LXVIII (1955), 393–416.
2. Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, 1951), p. 430.
3. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Universal Categories of Culture," in *Anthropology Today*, ed. A. L. Kroeber (Chicago, 1953), p. 517.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 517, n. 24.
5. C. F. Voegelin and Z. S. Harris, "Training in Anthropological Linguistics," *American Anthropologist*, n.s. LIV (1952), 324–325; Kluckhohn, p. 517.
6. For Thompson's discussion of the motif, see *The Folktale*, pp. 415–416.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 426. Italics mine.
8. Robert Lowie, "The Test-Theme in North American Mythology," *JAF*, XXI (1908), p. 109.
9. Thompson, pp. 415–416.
10. Hans Honti, "Märchenmorphologie and Märchentypologie," *Folk-Liv*, III (1939), pp. 307–8.
11. Form is not here considered as separate from meaning. There is wisdom in Pike's notion of a form-meaning composite in contrast to form without meaning or meaning without form. See Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Part I (Glendale, 1954), pp. 74, 99, 150.
12. This discussion is based upon Stith Thompson's revision of Antti Aarne's *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*, *The Types of the Folk-Tale*, FF Communications, No. 74 (Helsinki, 1928). However, none of the duplication has been eliminated in Thompson's 1961 revision of the tale-type index.
13. Thompson, *The Folktale*, p. 427.
14. Honti, p. 317.
15. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ed. Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson, trans. Laurence Scott, Publication Ten of the Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics (Bloomington, 1958), 19. Propp's study was also issued as Part III of the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, XXIV, No. 4 (1958), and as Volume 9 of the Bibliographical and Special Series of the American Folklore Society.
16. The importance of this particular theoretical point was not noted by either Archer Taylor or Melville Jacobs in their respective reviews of Propp's work. See *The Slavic and East European Journal*, XVII (1959), pp. 187–189; *JAF*, LXXII (1959), pp. 195–396.
17. Propp, p. 19.
18. Honti, p. 308.
19. Propp, p. 20.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 95.
21. Pike, pp. 9–10, 20.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 93.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

25. The various versions of the Potiphar's wife story may be found in Maurice Bloomfield, "Joseph and Potiphar in Hindu Fiction," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, LIV (1923), pp. 141–167, and Norman M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story: Being C. H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Kathā Sarit Sāgara* (London, 1923 ff.); II, pp. 120–121; III, pp. 109–110. The story of the Two Brothers may be found in G. Maspero, *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt*, trans. C. H. W. Johns (New York, 1915).
26. *Apollodorus The Library*, trans. J. G. Frazer, The Loeb Classical Library (London, 1921), II, p. 75. It is interesting that psychoanalysts consider that blindness may, in certain situations, be a symbolic equivalent of castration. This suggests that an examination of the allomotifs or different culturally determined localizations in the motifemes of borrowed international tales may provide insight into the system of symbolic equivalents employed in a given culture.
27. Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology, Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, XXXI (Washington, 1916), pp. 794–810.
28. Propp, p. 102.
29. Pike, pp. 8, 18. See also Robert Lado, *Linguistics Across Cultures* (Ann Arbor, 1957), p. 10.
30. Propp, p. 10.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
32. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'analyse morphologique de contes russes," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, III (1960), pp. 122–149.
33. Thomas A. Sebeok, "The Structure and Content of Cheremis Charms, Part I," *Anthropos*, XLVIII (1953), pp. 369–388. Unfortunately, most linguists err in treating linguistic units such as the morpheme as structural units of the folktale. This was recently pointed out by J. L. Fischer in his "Sequence and Structure in Folktales" in *Men and Cultures*, ed. Anthony F. C. Wallace (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 442–446, when he observed that if a folktale were translated from one language to another, the structure of the folktale might well remain the same though the linguistic structure would obviously change.

Postscript

The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique

IT MUST BE SAID AT the outset that the six-volume *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* and the Aarne-Thompson tale type index constitute two of the most valuable tools in the professional folklorist's arsenal of aids for analysis. This is so regardless of any legitimate criticisms of these two remarkable indices, the use of which serves to distinguish scholarly studies of folk narrative from those carried out by a host of amateurs and dilettantes. The identification of folk narratives through motif and/or tale type numbers has become an international sine qua non among bona fide folklorists. For this reason, the academic folklore community has reason to remain eternally grateful to Antti Aarne (1867–1925) and Stith Thompson (1885–1976) who twice revised Aarne's original 1910 *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*—in 1928 and in 1961—and who compiled two editions of the *Motif-Index* (1922–1936; 1955–1958).

There has been considerable discussion of the concepts of motif and tale type. Highlights of the motif literature include Bodker 1965:201–202; Meletinski 1977; Ben-Amos 1980; Courtes 1982; Bremond 1982; and Warzbach 1993. Representative views of the tale type may be found in Honti 1939; Greverus 1964; Jason 1972; and Georges 1983. Thompson defined the motif as “the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition” (1946:415; 1950b:1137).

Perhaps the most lucid delineation of the concept of tale type was made by the brilliant Hungarian folklorist János Honti. In his 1937 essay in *Folk-liv*, Honti proposed three different ways of considering a tale type as a viable unit of analysis. First, it consisted of a specific binding together of motifs; second, any one tale type could stand as a unique entity in contrast with other tale types, e.g., Cinderella is not the same story-plot as Little Red Riding Hood; and third, a tale type could be perceived as a kind of cookie-cutter Platonic form or model which manifested itself through multiple existence (such multiple instances being termed versions or variants). In an extended essay on “The Tale—Its World,” Honti makes it perfectly clear that he understands that “the concept of ‘type’ is merely an ideal construction.” But by the same token, Honti does not recognize the genuine utility of the concept: “. . . for the researcher, behind all these variants, only one ‘type’ exists . . . and therefore scholarship is entitled to construct a conceptual unity, considering the variants as constantly changing phenomena of an unchanging process” (1975:35). Although Honti employs the term “variants,” his definition of type seems eminently sane. It should be kept in mind, however, that a tale type is a *composite* plot synopsis corresponding in exact verbatim detail to no one individual version but at the same time encompassing to some extent *all* of the extant versions of that folktale.

There have been at least two major criticisms of the concepts of motif and tale type to date. The first, articulated most effectively by Scandinavian folklorists, concerns the alleged “independence” of the units. Anna Birgitta Rooth in a “Digression” entitled “The

Tale as Composition,” appended to her classic dissertation on Cinderella (1951:237–40), suggested that individual motifs were more often than not found to be interdependent upon other motifs in a given tale, and she proposed the notion of “motif-complex” to describe such tradition collocations of motifs. Similarly, Bengt Holbek argued that standard Aarne-Thompson tale typology “does violence” to the actual material collected in the field insofar as so-called types were often combined (1964:160). Yet despite his lifelong reservations about the concept of tale type—“It is not very clear”—Holbek did reluctantly admit that “types *do* exist to some extent” (1987:157, 158). It is certainly true that inasmuch as the magic tale (AT 300–749) typically ends with marriage—according to Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1988:63–64)—AT 480, The Spinning-Women by the Spring. The Kind and the Unkind Girls, which does *not* end with a marriage, frequently serves as the introduction to another tale type that *does* end with a marriage, e.g. AT 510A Cinderella (Roberts 1994:102).

The second criticism has to do with the alleged Eurocentrism of the concepts of motif and tale type. The argument in a nutshell is that these concepts were developed from a European data corpus and hence may not be applicable to nonwestern material, e.g., African folk narrative (Finnegan 1970:327–28). The idea in part stems from the correct observation that African storytellers in general favor improvisation more than do European storytellers and that this penchant for improvisation makes the notions of fixed motifs and tale types superfluous and irrelevant. The empirical evidence, however, would disprove this largely anti-European, anti-colonist ideological position insofar as there do seem to be identifiable African narrative motifs and stable traditional tale types (cf. Dundes 1977 and especially Bascom 1992).

Three other criticisms of the motif and the tale type might conveniently be grouped under the rubrics of 1) Overlapping, 2) Censorship, and 3) Ghost Entries. Thompson recognized the fuzziness and vagueness of his definitions of motif and tale type, but he actually went so far as to defend such definitions because supposedly they avoided “long debates” (cf. Dundes 1964:54). Thompson admitted that “somewhat more than half of the types” in the tale type index “consist of a single narrative motif” (1946:417, 439). This means that to a large extent the motif and tale type systems are overlapping. The vast majority of animal tales (AT 1–299) are *both* single tale type numbers and single motif numbers. The same holds true for “Tales of the Stupid Ogre” (AT 2009–2430) among others. So then what is the essential difference, if any, between a motif and a tale type? In these instances, virtually none. The distinction becomes more meaningful in more complex tales, e.g., “Tales of Magic” (AT 300–729) which consist of sequences of numerous motifs rather than just one. One of the key differences between a motif and a tale type is that all versions of a tale type are assumed to be genetically related, that is, they are assumed to be cognate, whereas all narratives listed under a motif heading may or may not be related. Any account of the origin of the sun, for example, could be listed under motif A710, Creation of the Sun. To be fair, Thompson himself was well aware of this distinction (1946:415–16; 1950a:753).

The problem of “overlapping” goes far beyond the confusion of motif and tale type in so many narratives. It occurs within *both* the conceptualization of motifs and tale types. In defining motifs, Thompson claims they fall in to three classes: actors, items, and incidents (1946:415–16). (It is the latter category of “incidents” that overlaps with tale types.) The obvious difficulty is: how can there possibly be an “incident” motif that does not include either an “actor” motif or an “item” motif? The categories of motifs delineated by Thompson are thus not at all mutually exclusive and in fact are unavoidably overlapping.

Tale types are also overlapping although this problem was caused by Aarne's original classification scheme and cannot be blamed on Thompson. Aarne elected—in retrospect unwisely—to classify folktales partly on the basis of *dramatis personae*. Thus his first section consisted of animal tales (AT 1–299) in which the principal actors in the tales were animal characters. (For the inconsistencies even within Aarne's animal categories, see von Sydow 1948.) Aarne's mistake was not classifying tales on the basis of narrative plot rather than the *dramatis personae*. The reality of folktales, for example, demonstrates that the same tale can be told with either animal or human characters. As a result of Aarne's mistake, we often find the very same tale, that is, tale type in the true genetic sense, listed twice in the Aarne-Thompson index under two separate numbers. Thompson tried his best to alleviate the problem through a system of cross-referencing, but the fundamental theoretical issue was not really resolved. A substantial number of animal tales, for example, are clearly also tales involving ogres or numskulls. AT 9B In the Division of the Crop the Fox Takes the Corn = AT 1030 The Crop Division. Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp pointed out this obvious overlap in 1928 (1968:5–6). In similar fashion, AT 43 = AT 1097; AT 121 = AT 1250; AT 123 = AT 333; AT 126 = AT 1149, etc. The point is that the same tale should not have two or more different tale type numbers! So we can see that in some instances, motifs overlap with tale types, and in others, tale types overlap with other tale types. Such overlapping surely suggests that both the current motif and tale type systems are flawed.

Another serious problem with both the motif and tale type indices involves the recurring issue of censorship. Thompson indulged in what can only be described as absurd and excessive prudery. To the extent that folkloristics is a science, albeit a social science, it cannot or should not be victimized by self-imposed censorship. This is especially grievous in the case of folkloristic data because so much of folklore deals with unabashedly taboo topics. In that context, a decision by a scholar to omit “obscene” data from standard collections and indices is inexcusable. Thompson states his philosophy with respect to such motifs in an obscure footnote in the *Motif-Index* (1957:514, n. 1): “Thousands of obscene motifs in which there is no point except the obscenity itself might logically come at this point, but they are entirely beyond the scope of this present work. . . . In view of the possibility that it might become desirable to classify these motifs and place them within the present index, space has been left from X700 to X749 for such motifs.” One cannot possibly help but wonder at Thompson's skewed logic in leaving only fifty numerical slots for “thousands of obscene motifs.” (For an incisive critique of Thompson's prudery, see Legman's 1962 essay “Toward A Motif-Index of Erotic Humor.”) So obscene folklore motifs were simply intentionally omitted by Thompson in the *Motif-Index*. A slightly different strategy was employed in the tale type index. In this index, Thompson does assign numbers to some obscene tales, but his accompanying verbal synopsis is either too brief to be of much use or is absent altogether. Two examples should suffice. AT 1420G Anser Venalis (Goose as Gift) is followed by the following oblique sentence: “The lover regains his gift by a ruse (obscene).” This is not a very informative synopsis. What is the ruse? (For a version of this tale, see Afanasyev 1966:56–57, 268–69). Even worse is Thompson's listing of AT 1355*. Here the number is followed only by “(obscene),” which tells us absolutely nothing whatsoever about the content of the tale. Why even bother to include such a useless entry? (For a possible version of this tale, see Afanasyev 1966:183–84.) This sort of conscious omission of “obscene” folklore from the tale type and motif indices surely impairs the utility of these otherwise helpful scholarly aids.

Finally, a problem which is more of an annoyance is what might be termed “ghost entries.” Now it must be understood that in a mammoth compilation of the scope of the indices under discussion, it is quite understandable that typographical errors or occasional omissions are bound to occur. Thompson did, after all, carry out his enormous labors in the pre-computer era. Still, such errors can be frustrating to would-be users of the indices. There is no point in listing all such errata, but several examples may illustrate the problem. Thompson’s bibliographical code of signalling monographic studies of a particular tale type with a double asterisk prefix as opposed to mere lists of versions by a single asterisk is employed throughout the Aarne-Thompson tale type index, but is never explained. The explanation is, however, to be found in the introduction to the *Motif-Index* (1955:23) where the same system is utilized.

Many of the errors are minor. For instance, under motif B31.1 Roc. A giant bird which carries men off in its claws, we find a cross-reference to K186.1.1, Hero sewed up in an animal hide so as to be carried to height by bird. But inspection reveals that there is no such motif as K186.1.1! There is, however, motif K1861.1 which is the correct motif. It is just a typographical error involving a mere decimal point, but it could prove terribly frustrating to even an experienced user of the *Motif-Index*. In volume 6, the index volume of the *Motif-Index*, under the entry “Book” we find the last reference to be “value to b. depends on appreciation of it through J1061.5.” In the relevant J section, we find J1061.1 through J1061.4, but no J1061.5! In the same volume 6 under the entry “Shadow,” we find “undesired lover asked not to step on s. K1277.6.” A quick check shows that there is no motif K1277 at all. Similar discrepancies occur in the tale type index. Under AT 74C Rabbit Throws Coconut, we find “Cf. Type 22.” But there is no tale type 22! After AT 1510 The Matron of Ephesus, we find “Cf. Type 1752” but there is no such tale type listed. These sorts of errors could be corrected in future editions of these indices.

Less easy to correct is one last basic theoretical deficiency to be found in the tale type index. Whereas the *Motif-Index* offers worldwide coverage of folk narrative, the tale type index does not. According to Thompson’s introduction, “the folktales of all the world” are *not* considered in the index. Rather, it is only the Indo-European folktale which is the acknowledged delimited corpus covered. In Thompson’s own words, “Strictly then, this work might be called ‘The Types of The Folk-Tale of Europe, West Asia, and the Lands Settled by These Peoples’” (Aarne and Thompson 1961:7). By definition, then, native American tale types and African tale types, among other nonwestern narratives, are intentionally excluded. The problem is that some of the tales presently included in the tale type index are *not* Indo-European tales at all, but rather are incontrovertibly native American or African tale types! Two examples may suffice to illustrate this claim. AT 297A, Turtle’s War Party, is a classic native American tale type (cf. Dundes 1978). It is *not* found in the Indo-European narrative tradition at all. Its occurrence in Japan alone was apparently the basis for its inclusion in the AT index. Taking Thompson’s introduction to the index at face value, an unwary index user might wrongly assume that the native Americans borrowed it from the Indo-European corpus, but this is not the case. AT tale type 291 Deceptive Tug-of-war, is an equally classic *African* tale type. It is *not* found in the Indo-European corpus except for one lone text reported in Peru. Again, it is evidently this single Peruvian text that convinced Thompson to include it in his 1961 revision of the Aarne index. (For references to sixty-one African versions of this tale, see Paulme and Bremond 1980.) Again, the naive user of the index might wrongly conclude that all of the many versions in Africa and in the African diaspora had been borrowed from the Indo-European tradition, but

this is not the case. One day when there are comprehensive published tale type indices for *all* African tale types and for *all* native (North and South) American tale types, such errors will be easier to correct.

The overlapping difficulties of the motif and tale type indices aside, the unfortunate omission of obscene folk narrative notwithstanding, and overlooking or ignoring the ghost references and the misleading inclusion of native American and African tale types in the AT index, the fact remains that the motif and tale type indices with all their faults remain indispensable for the identification of traditional folk narratives. Since identification is a necessary prerequisite for interpretation, we folklorists simply cannot do without these standard indices. Moreover, the individual tale type indices for particular cultures or countries (cf. Assolina 1987) can serve as field guides or “finding lists” for prospective fieldworkers. Imperfect though they may be, they represent the keystones for the comparative method in folkloristics, a method which despite postmodernist naysayers and other prophets of gloom continues to be the hallmark of international folkloristics.

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